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FM AMCONSUL SURABAYA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0419

INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

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SIPDIS

STATE FOR CA/OCS/ACS/EAP - YOSHIAKI GOTOH

DOJ FOR ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND FIREARMS

STATE FOR EAP/MTS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: CASC SNAR SOCI ETRD ID

SUBJECT: METHANOL SPIKED "ARAK" RESULTS IN MULTIPLE DEATHS IN BALI

¶1. Indonesian authorities on the island of Bali have confirmed more than 50 cases of suspected methanol poisoning associated with consumption of apparent methanol-spiked "arak" (also referred to as "arrack"). Arak is a common home-brewed alcoholic beverage in Bali, but is also produced by a few local companies and has been seen for sale at the Bali International Airport. Methanol is sometimes added to the beverage to increase its potency, although this is usually the case only with home-brewed arak. The consumption of the methanol-spiked beverage has reportedly resulted in the death of more than 20 persons since May 25, 2009. Among those who are suspected to have died due to consumption of arak are one American citizen and three Europeans. While most of the deaths have occurred in Bali, two of the Europeans died on the island of Lombok after drinking arak.

¶2. Authorities report that the deceased all displayed symptoms of acute alcohol poisoning. While authorities have yet to determine the source(s) of the methanol tainted beverage(s), this is the largest known incidence of methanol poisoning in Bali. While early indications point to methanol, a member of the medical staff at Sanglah Hospital in Bali noted that it takes about one week to receive conclusive results from the forensic laboratory. It was also noted that some of the deceased displayed visible signs of lip irritation. Police have reportedly ordered toxicology tests for all recent death cases in Bali.

¶3. Post sent a warden message on June 2, 2009, advising American Citizens to exercise extreme caution and to avoid consumption of arak liquor. Post is not aware of any exports of alcoholic beverages from Bali, although arak is almost certainly purchased in Bali and carried elsewhere by travelers. Post will continue to monitor the situation and will contact Indonesian customs officials as well as the Bali Department of Health to determine if company-produced arak is being removed from shelves and if arak is exported.

MCCLELLAND